

RECOVERY COMMITTEE
9TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Recovery Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday, 9th September 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Jones (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Marion Bateman, Clive Carver, Geoff Collett, David Healey, Patrick Heesom, Joe Johnson, Hilary McGuill, Vicky Perfect, and Kevin Rush

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Ian Dunbar for Councillor Paul Cunningham

APOLOGIES: Councillor Helen Brown

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Christine Jones – Deputy Leader of the Council (Partnerships) and Cabinet Member for Social Services, Cabinet Member for Finance and Social Value, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Corporate Finance Manager, Head of Democratic Services, Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development, Senior Manager, Children and Workforce, Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Team Leader, Democratic Services.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

32. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th August 2021 were submitted.

Matters arising

On minute number 25, Councillor Jones asked what the “usual” number of voids was in the housing stock which needed to be brought back into use. The Chief Officer explained that the figure was approximately 155. On the private sector rent arrears support scheme, the Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator said she would re-send the link to members of the Committee.

Councillor McGuill asked, on minute number 27, if 16-17 year olds would receive a second dose of the vaccine. The Chief Executive was attending a meeting later that day and he would then be able to respond.

The minutes were moved as an accurate record by Councillor Marion Bateman and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGuill.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. CORPORATE RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that Wales, and the North Wales region, continued to be in a second phase of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The ongoing endemic situation was now being managed.

The report provided an update on the corporate objectives adopted by the Council.

Finance

The Corporate Finance Manager said there had been little change since the last meeting. The Council continued to maximise national assistance from the Hardship Fund and other government funding. He was pleased to report that it had recently been confirmed that the funding would continue until the end of the current financial year.

Workforce

The Senior Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) explained that, working with Public Health Wales (PHW) and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) the Council had provided some of the workforce with an opportunity to undertake a supervised lateral flow device test. Those who had participated had returned a negative test which gave assurance over the safety measures in place in the workplace.

A need had been identified for internal provision of physiotherapy as this would be a more cost effective alternative to present arrangements, enabling greater control for the organisation to support employees based on clinical need.

Risk assessments were being reviewed to determine the optimum operating model for the workforce, which delivered the strategic objectives of the Digital Strategy and achieved a content, productive, safe and effective hybrid workforce.

Governance

The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that the Council had launched its digital hub to ensure that no one was excluded by reason of not having access to the skills. It was a website that enabled people to help others to get online or to build their own skills and confidence. Importantly, it was supported in person by Connect employees and partners, such as Aura, who would also provide access to devices and connectivity. In response to a question from Councillor Jones, the Chief Officer said it was advertised through a range of partners, such as Age Concern and FLVC.

On collection rates of Council Tax, NNDR, Sundry Debt and housing rents to target levels, recovery rates were still slightly below target for this stage of the year. Efforts were in place to increase recovery levels. However, the previous

year the Revenues Service was focussed on delivering grants and helping residents get relief, rather than collection. There was considerable uncertainty around the potential impact arising from the end of the national Furlough scheme.

Councillor Jones said the support provided from Governments should be acknowledged. Councillor Hilary McGuill asked if the suggestion of a single vaccine certificate that would be recognised throughout the UK could be raised. The Chief Executive said he would raise that.

Councillor Johnson moved the report, which was seconded by Councillor McGuill.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee be assured by progress in meeting the recovery objectives.

34. CORPORATE RECOVERY RISK PROFILE

The Strategic Performance Advisor introduced the report which provided an update on the Corporate Recovery Risk Register and Mitigations, which were detailed in appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

Risks were being managed well and had been throughout the pandemic. There were currently 44.4% of risks rated green, 52.8% rated as amber and 2.8% as red.

There were a total of 35 risks that had previously been closed; 34 of those closed due to reaching target risk rating. One risk was closed due to duplication and there were no risks which were to be closed at this review.

Long terms risks were being managed. The previous month two risks had been merged and it was recommended that risk CF14 be removed from the Corporate Risk Register and it was also on the Housing Risk Register and would be reported to Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor McGuill on the impact on the collection of Business Rates from businesses closing, the Chief Executive suggested that the Revenues Manager be asked to provide a status report across Flintshire showing which businesses had closed/opened and the economic impact. The Chief Officer (Governance) suggested that the Revenues Manager liaise with Enterprise and Regeneration Manager on the report.

Councillor Dunbar asked if, in relation to CF08 and the reduction in Council Tax collection, whether this would see a rise in Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The Chief Executive said that the demand for CTRS Council would be met as it was a legal requirement. On Universal Credit and the end of furlough, Councillor Dunbar asked if they would have an impact on residents. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) advised that if any Members had constituents who were in financial difficulty then support was available. He advised that they

contact the Welfare Team who offered great support and could help to signpost to any available funding and any other appropriate areas. He would send the contact details out to Members.

In response to a question from Councillor Bateman, it was agreed that the Housing and Assets Team be included in the report on the take up of business units to provide a fuller report showing the landscape emerging.

Councillor Jones asked for an update on risk CF10. The Chief Executive explained that this was a volatile area but the time of writing the report, the Council was not getting compromised on the supply of goods. In response to a further question on risk CW09, the Chief Executive explained that this was due to not having enough members of staff in Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) and the requirement to extract staff from service areas.

Councillor Ian Dunbar moved the recommendations in the report, including the additional recommendation on a report on businesses across Flintshire, which was seconded by Councillor Richard Jones.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the latest risk register and risk mitigation actions within the corporate priorities be noted;
- (b) That CF14 be removed from the Corporate Risk Register; and
- (c) That a status report on businesses across Flintshire, to include information on the economic impact, be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

35. WORKFORCE RECOVERY PLANNING

The Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development, gave a verbal update on general workforce attendance with attendance being very good. Covid related absence was reported as 0.48%. The authority was able to identify people who were isolating and establish if they were able to work from home.

The number of employees with long covid was reported to be 0.3% and the Council was working with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to develop a long covid pathway and employees were being signposted to the Nuffield Hospital.

As reported earlier, internal provision of a Physiotherapist would be provided and was based on clinical need. An extension to sick pay had been developed and managers could use their discretion as to whether an employee's sick pay should be extended.

Flu vaccines for key workers had been booked with staff in Social Services to receive theirs first.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) explained that there were no issues with the workforce in schools. Throughout all of the schools, only 16 staff were currently absent and there were no absences to report from within the Education and Youth portfolio.

In response to a question from Councillor McGuill on how the PRS Hardship Fund was being promoted, the Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) said he would provide that information to the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the information be received.

36. RISKS AND ISSUES WITHIN PORTFOLIOS

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that Portfolio Recovery Business Plans had been developed for exiting the first response phase to the pandemic in 2020.

The Recovery Committee had had oversight of the Recovery Business Plans for all five service portfolios during recent meetings. During each of those meetings the relevant Chief Officers highlighted significant areas of risk. This report presented progress and updates on those areas of risk for each of the portfolios.

Education and Youth

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) said it had been a smooth start to the academic year with all schools opening as planned. Uncertainty around operational changes which may need to be implemented were being managed. A constructive meeting with Headteachers had been held on the first day of term to enable the local authority to respond to any queries and concerns.

Schools would carefully monitor the health and well-being of their pupils on their return to school, and their academic progress, and support for individuals would be adjusted as needed. She explained the new guidance on isolation should a child in school test positive for covid, whereby as the national level was 0, children who had been in contact with the child who had tested positive would only need to isolate and get a test if they displayed symptoms; otherwise they could continue to attend school.

Housing and Assets)

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) explained that the rental income continued to be impacted by the pandemic and when furlough and other protections ended, the situation would become worse. The position would be further compromised when Universal Credit (UC) additional payments were stopped and the implications of the new 'Breathing Space' measure were taking into account (60 day hold on all creditor activity).

Homelessness presentations increased as current protections around evictions and furlough ended, and landlords taking measures to commence and follow through on stalled evictions.

Raw material supplies shortages had led to increased costs, programme delays and increased cases of contractual disputes. The Council continued to identify alternative suppliers or source stock and hold for future use.

Councillor McGuill asked how the Tenant Hardship Grant was promoted amongst private landlords. The Chief Officer explained it was promoted through the Housing Options Team and through the Private Rented Sector Landlords Forum. He would look into other ways of promoting the grant. In response to a comment from Councillor Dunbar on UC, the Chief Officer said the Council was aware of the implications and reports would be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet

Planning, Environment and Economy

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) explained about the resilience of various teams due to unprecedented demand to services during the pandemic. Business cases were being prepared to recruit into Planning Enforcement, Environmental Health, Drainage and Flood Protection and Town Centre Regeneration. In Public Protection, resources had been in overwhelming demand.

He provided an update on the Local Development Plan (LDP) Examination in Public (EIP) being temporarily suspended to deal with two matters, the Strategic site at Warren Hall in Broughton and the implications of new guidance from National Resources Wales (NRW) on pollution levels in rivers. The former matter would be addressed on 8th September. The latter issue had resulted in considerable extra work. It was hoped that a Statement of Common Ground between the Council and NRW would be submitted to the EIP in October which would satisfy the Planning Inspector and allow her to finalise her reports.

Reports would be submitted to Planning Strategy Group and Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present the details of the new back office system.

In response to a question from Councillor Healey on planning site visits, the Chief Officer explained the current process which was built around the Risk Assessment. If the planning officer was unable to get the required information from Google Maps or Street View, they would undertake a site visit and take photographs. At the planning call-over meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair, details were provided on applications where the local Member had requested a site visit and the Chair and Vice Chair are provided with all of the information gleaned from the case officer. If the Chair and Vice Chair felt enough information was available to Member to make a decision, a site visit would not take place. If at the Committee meeting Members did not feel they had sufficient information, the item could be deferred to enable a site visit to be undertaken. It was agreed that a report would be submitted to Planning Strategy Group on site visits.

Social Services

The Senior Manager – Children and Workforce provided details on the recruitment of staff to work in the sector, which encompassed social work, occupational therapy and direct social work. He explained about the fragility of the market around Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) nursing and the recruitment of staff, and the funding and fees linked to market stability. Those three risks were closely linked and a number of work streams were underway, including the appointment of a post, grant funding to support a sector wide approach to recruitment of the direct work force, and supporting care providers to review and strengthen business plans.

Councillor Jones said that when there was a shortage of front line staff, the number of care packages would increase for other members of the team and he asked how that was managed. The Senior Manager explained that where they had double handed calls, they would look to how technology could be used to identify if one person could be used. Children’s Services Assistants had been recruited and consideration was being given as to how they could take on some of the Social Worker tasks to free up time for the Social Workers.

Councillor McGuill asked how many student Social Workers were being sponsored by the Council. The Senior Manager said he would provide a written response to the question.

Streetscene and Transportation

The Chief Executive explained that this service had experienced an increase in the numbers of frontline workers needing to self-isolate which had an impact on effective service delivery when combined with general sickness absence and annual leaver over the summer.

The service was unable to progress with key infrastructure improvement projects due to lack of resilience in staff, contractors and the supply chain. Also, regulatory approval could not be gained to progress key infrastructure projects in a timely manner due to delays in processing applications.

The recommendation in the report, and the inclusion of a second recommendation on site visits, were moved by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress of the highlighted areas of risk within all five portfolios identified at earlier meetings of this Committee be noted; and
- (b) That a report be submitted to Planning Strategy Group to consider the reinstatement of Planning Committee Site Visits.

37. ALLOCATION OF RISKS TO COMMITTEES

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the report and explained that on 27th July 2021 a meeting of the Governance & Audit and Overview and Scrutiny

Committee Liaison Group was held to consider the allocation of risks to the relevant Governance & Audit Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Flintshire County Council's Council Plan 2021/22 had been approved at County Council in May 2021 and Portfolio Recovery Business Plans had been developed for exiting the pandemic. Risks from both of those documents had been considered during meetings of this Committee. Whilst reviewing the above documents, this report concentrated on the 'red' risks, with a document outlining the allocation of risks to the relevant Committees being appended to the report.

Councillor Johnson moved the recommendations in the report which were seconded by Councillor Dunbar.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the allocation of risks to the relevant Committees as suggested be agreed; and
- (b) That an update report be submitted to the Recovery Committee.

38. REGIONAL RECOVERY UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update on regional recovery. The region was at alert level 0 and there were no discussions underway on potential future lockdowns. Consideration was being given to health and social care during the winter months, including the demand for things such as elective surgeries which had not been taking place.

The vaccine booster programme was due to be launched, information on supplies was awaited.

During the last seven days the incidence rate in Flintshire was one of the lowest in Wales.

The Chief Executive suggested that the Committee meet on a bi-monthly basis which was accepted.

In response to a question from Councillor McGuill on the vaccine booster programme, the Chief Executive explained that Betsi Cadwalдар University Health Board (BCUHB) was the executor of the programme and residents would be contacted directly. Sites were currently being identified as to where the boosters could be delivered from.

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.

39. COMMUNITY RECOVERY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) provided a verbal update on community recovery.

The Enterprise and Regeneration team would focus on town centre recovery, with the Benefits team focussing on supporting poverty. The next meeting of the Joint Public Service Board was scheduled for 30th September and a report on priority actions would be brought to the Committee in November.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the information be noted; and
- (b) That a report on priority actions be submitted to the Committee in November.

40. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed that the following reports be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 4th November 2021: Corporate Recovery Objectives; Corporate Recovery Risk Profile; Feedback on consideration of risks identified by the Committee by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and Joint PSB priority actions in respect of recovery.

RESOLVED:

That reports on the following be submitted to the meeting on 4th November 2021:

- Corporate Recovery Objectives;
- Corporate Recovery Risk Profile;
- Feedback on consideration of risks identified by the Committee by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committees; and
- Joint PSB priority actions – in respect of recovery.

41. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

None.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and finished at 12.13 pm

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Chairman